

VZCZCXRO8403
PP RUEHDE RUEHDH RUEHDIR
DE RUEHRH #0837 1760609
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 250609Z JUN 09
FM AMEMBASSY RIYADH
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1047
INFO RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHBD/AMEMBASSY BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN PRIORITY 0014
RUEHBK/AMEMBASSY BANGKOK PRIORITY 0279
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY 0151
RUEHKL/AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR PRIORITY 0059
RUEHML/AMEMBASSY MANILA PRIORITY 0719
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 0491
RUEHNL/AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT PRIORITY 0028
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY 0277
RUEHPH/CDC ATLANTA GA PRIORITY

UNCLAS RIYADH 000837

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/ARP (HARRIS)

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [ECON](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [TBIO](#) [KFLU](#) [CASC](#) [ASEC](#) [AMGT](#) [SA](#)

SUBJECT: SAUDI ARABIA H1N1 UPDATE: 48 CASES, NO TRAVEL
BANS, POTENTIALLY MORE CASES

REF: 09RIYADH800

¶1. (SBU) On June 23, the Ministry of Health (MOH) confirmed 45 cases of H1N1 in Saudi Arabia since June 3, and on June 25 the Arab News reported three additional cases. The Ministry has reported no fatalities to date, and 17 of the H1N1 patients have been released from the hospital. Several patients were identified as H1N1-positive upon return from travel to the Philippines, the United States, Canada, Australia, Malaysia, Brunei, Thailand, and India, and the remainder were infected upon close contact with the returning travelers. The H1N1-infected persons reportedly range in age from 2 months to 32 years, including 17 under the age of 10. Ten of the reported H1N1 cases have been health workers, all Filipina and Malaysian nurses.

¶2. (SBU) To date, the Saudi government has imposed no travel bans. Sheikh Abdul Mohsen Al-Obaikan, a senior Saudi cleric and member of the Shoura (Consultative) Council was quoted by the Okaz Daily as saying "it is not proper to ban people from Hajj." He added that travel to and from countries with reported cases of swine flu should not be impaired. Sheikh Abdul Aziz Al-Asheikh, the Kingdom's Grand Mufti, said the concerns over exposure to swine flu at the pilgrimage were exaggerated. The MOH is moving forward with Hajj preparations, including a June 28-30 H1N1 workshop with the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and World Health Organization (WHO) in Jeddah. Health officials from 20 health regions will participate, and the H1N1 experts will visit the Hajj Terminal of King Abdulaziz International Airport in Jeddah to discuss preventive measures.

¶3. (SBU) A nurse who works at King Abdulaziz Medical City (KAMC) told Econoff on June 20 that 7 KAMC nurses had tested H1N1-positive. She added that KAMC was treating "several" other H1N1 patients, some of whom had been infected by the hospital staff. Econoff later confirmed that only 5 of the 7 H1N1-positive KAMC nurses had been confirmed in the press by the Ministry. Several other health workers told Econoff that they are more concerned about dengue fever than H1N1, as the H1N1 strain is very mild, while dengue fever is more prevalent and debilitating. (Note: The Embassy Medical Unit reviewed KAMC's H1N1 reporting forms and infection control precautions documents, and found the guidance to be reasonable. The transmission of H1N1 between hospital staff and patients is partly due to the incubation period of this H1N1 strain, and subsequent delayed appearance of symptoms. End note.)

¶4. (SBU) Comment: The Saudi government is responding expeditiously to all emerging H1N1 cases, and remains focused on prevention and surveillance in preparation for the upcoming pilgrimage season. The health worker's account indicates that MOH's reporting regimen is not flawless, but Post does not believe that the Kingdom is downplaying the seriousness of the outbreak. End comment.

¶5. (U) Henceforth Post will submit weekly H1N1 updates.
ERDMAN